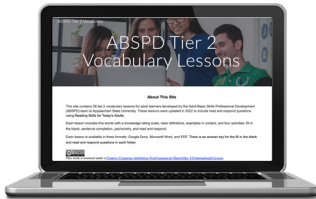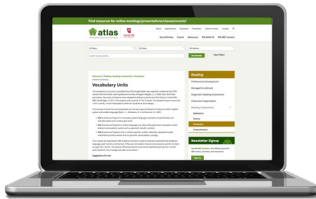**Resource Review**

# Review of Tier 2 Vocabulary Websites

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- ***Adult Basic Skills Professional Development (ABSPD) Tier 2 Vocabulary Lessons at https://sites.google.com/view/abspdtier-2-vocabulary/home?pli=1 (no registration required, no fee)***

- ***ATLAS ABE Teaching & Learning Advancement System at https://atlasabe.org/resource/vocabulary-units/ (no registration required, no fee)***

Adult educators will tell you how challenging it is for adult learners when they encounter unknown words while reading. Students' comprehension grinds to a halt as they struggle with demanding vocabulary. Improving vocabulary knowledge gives adult learners the skills they need to read texts with understanding. This review focuses on two similar resources for teaching Tier 2 vocabulary. Tier 2 words are academic vocabulary that cut across multiple content areas. Tier 2 vocabulary includes words like *complex*, *establish*, and *verify.*

The first resource, the ABSPD Tier 2 Vocabulary Lessons, was developed by Adult Basic Skills Professional Development at Appalachian State University. It features 38 Tier 2 vocabulary lessons designed specifically for adult learners. ATLAS, Minnesota's ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System, created the second resource that contains 32 Tier 2 vocabulary lessons.

Both of these freely available online resources

furnish Tier 2 vocabulary lessons designed for direct vocabulary instruction. The lessons supply basic word definitions and examples of how each word is used in context. The resources then give students' application activities such as matching, fill-in-the-blanks, true/false, yes/no/why, and read and respond. One resource also has writing prompts.

While most adult basic education students benefit from vocabulary instruction, these two resources are designed for learners in grade level equivalents 4 to 9. Learners below level 4 may still need instruction in Tier 1 (basic words like *chair*) words. Students above grade level 9 usually spend more time learning Tier 3 words which are more complex, content specific words like *hypotenuse*.

The evidence base recommends direct vocabulary instruction that includes clear definitions and rich discussions of the word in context. Students should be given multiple opportunities to interact with words over several days and the chance to complete

formative assessments to show understanding. Instructors should encourage students to use new vocabulary on an ongoing basis in their speech and writing (Beck et al., 2002).

## ABSPD Tier 2 Vocabulary Lessons

The ABSPD lessons are housed on a dedicated website. All 38 lessons are available in three formats (Microsoft Word, Google Doc, and PDF) conveniently housed in its own section on the website. The lessons are free and available for use under a Creative Commons License. Multiple formats allow for versatility which makes it easier for instructors to adapt lessons to face-to-face, online, or HyFlex instruction.

Lessons begin with a Knowledge Rating Scale where students choose one of four selections ranging from, "I've never heard this word before" to "I know the meaning of this word." This exercise is a unique and useful feature in the vocabulary lessons as it helps activate students' background knowledge and prepares them for new learning.

Every lesson supplies word definitions. A key consideration for any vocabulary resource is its definition clarity. Some dictionary definitions confuse learners by using many unfamiliar words. ABSPD provides clear definitions using as few words as possible while still conveying adequate meaning. For example, the word *alter* is defined as "to change something," while the word *prominent* is defined as "important and well-known." The resource also provides the part of speech as well as synonyms and antonyms.

The research findings note how important it is to teach words in a meaningful context. ABSPD supplies a short example paragraph where words are used in context. For instance, the context for the word *scarce* discusses product scarcity during the holiday season. Usually only one context

scenario is supplied for each word which may limit students' understanding. Additional contexts would be welcome. The example section closes with a question inviting learners to supply their own context. Additional questions to invite deeper student discussion around a variety of topics would be useful.

Next, the ABSPD lessons move into application exercises. The activities flow in a logical progression from less to more challenging. Less challenging activities include fill-in-the- blanks and sentence completion. A positive feature of the sentence completion exercise is that they are open-ended. For the word *conclusion*, the sentence reads, "I felt relieved at the conclusion of _____." Learners must show they understand how to use a word to logically complete the sentences.

More challenging learning experiences include yes/no/why and read and respond. Yes/no/why questions are also open-ended as they can be answered in two ways and invite learners to explain their reasoning. An example sentence is, "Do **transparent** instructions make you more willing to complete and **submit** assignments?" (Tier 2 words are in bold print.)  ABSPD yes/no/ why questions contain either one or two new Tier 2 words. Some learners may find tackling sentences with two new words very challenging.

The last type of application activity is read and respond. These questions feature Tier 2 words in questions related to a provided reading passage. Learners must apply their knowledge of these new words to successfully understand and answer the questions. The reading passages are taken from the Reading Skills for Today's Adults resource and are of appropriate challenge for intermediate level (grade level equivalent 4 to 9) readers. Questions have one or two Tier 2 words. All the application activities are useful for giving

learners ongoing opportunities to use words in their speech and writing.

An added feature of the ABSPD lessons is the interactive online practice developed by the nonprofit CrowdED Learning during a 2020 EdTech Maker Space. This practice consists of Quizlet decks, flashcard-style exercises where students can test their knowledge of the new words. Learners can access Quizlet through a QR code or web address. The interactive practice is a welcome bonus as it supplies learners with additional opportunities to reinforce their new vocabulary knowledge and could be used as homework or for informal assessment.

## ATLAS Vocabulary Lessons

Minnesota adult educators adapted the ATLAS Vocabulary Lessons from those created by the Illinois Adult Learning Resource Center. The Illinois lessons each feature 10 words. The ATLAS lesson designers concluded that learning 10 new Tier 2 words at one time may be challenging for many adult learners, so the ATLAS exercises feature only 5 words. The lessons are housed on a Google Drive linked to the ATLAS website, which is an open resource. There are 32 sets of Tier 2 vocabulary lessons.

Lessons begin by providing clear, accessible definitions. For example, the word *major* is defined as, "very large or important" while the word *distinction* is explained as "a clear difference between things." These definitions are robust enough for learners to comprehend without being too wordy.

Notably, these lessons contain two or three examples of how each word is used in common contexts. Having several contextual examples aids students' learning as they can understand how the words are used in different areas. However, this

resource lacks pre-prepared questions that invite learners to supply their own context.

The ATLAS lessons furnish application activities that move in a logical progression of increasing difficulty. They begin with a match the word to the definition activity. The next two exercises are fill-in-the-blanks. This additional practice is beneficial as instructors have three basic activities for use in developing student understanding.

As for more complex activities, the ATLAS lessons have sentence completion, true-false and why, and writing prompt ideas. The sentence completions give relatable examples appropriate for adult learners such as, "A **major** challenge in my life is … ," and "One **factor** I considered when I enrolled in school was …." (Tier 2 words are in bold print.) The true-false and why activity provides realistic challenges using a variety of real-world examples.

Finally, the research base indicates that students should be encouraged to use new words in their writing. The ATLAS resource concludes with ideas for writing prompts. Examples such as, "Name factors in your life that helped shape the person you are today," which offer learners additional opportunities to practice using new word knowledge in context while practicing writing skills.

ABSPD and ATLAS lessons have some dated examples which is to be expected since they were developed over 10 years ago. Some vocabulary context examples are state or regionally specific, but these are minor issues in what otherwise are two highly beneficial resources.

## Suggestions for Use

How might vocabulary instruction look using the ABSPD vocabulary lessons? First, students should fill out the Knowledge Rating Scale to activate their background knowledge and prepare to learn.

Using the definitions and context provided, the instructor then teaches the new words and definitions. Students can fill out graphic organizers such as quadrant charts to organize their learning. During instruction, educators should supply examples of several contexts and facilitate dialogue to aid student understanding. Word meaning instruction concludes with students going back over their answers to the Knowledge Rating Scale. Learners are encouraged to modify their answers based on what they learned during the lesson.

To practice using new words, students should complete some application activities in every class session. For a class meeting twice a week, learners may do the fill-in-the- blanks and sentence completion activities in the first class. In the second class, students could do the yes/no/why and read and respond exercises. Instructors should evaluate learners' responses in a whole group discussion, asking students to provide the rationale behind their answer choices. Multiple student perspectives during the discussion aids learning.

## Recommendations

The ABSPD and ATLAS vocabulary resources enable instructors to teach vocabulary using evidence-based practices. Adult literacy professionals knowledgeable in research and andragogy created these resources. Lesson developers selected Tier 2 words from well-known academic word lists. Both resources are completely free and easily accessible. They minimize preparation time because of their easily followed format, a great advantage for busy adult educators with limited preparation time. The two resources contain helpful answer keys for the matching, fill-in-the-blanks, and read and respond questions.

Each of the lesson sets compare favorably with well-known vocabulary resources like the *Townsend Press Vocabulary Series* and *Words to Learn By*. Unlike those resources, both the ABSPD and ATLAS lessons are free. The ABSPD and ATLAS resources present only five words per lesson while *Townsend Press* and *Words to Learn By* have more than five. Trying to learn more than five new Tier 2 words at a time may create student confusion while providing them with less practice.

These lessons are best used by instructors of intermediate-level learners and above. According to the adult reading components study, 75 percent of adult basic education intermediate-level students need vocabulary instruction to improve their reading skills (Strucker & Davidson, 2003). Direct and explicit vocabulary instruction using these resources will assist students in developing a more robust vocabulary which will serve them well in achieving their educational and career goals.

# References

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press.

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